

HISTORY OF OAK GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 1836 - 1983

Oak Grove United Methodist Church is located in the Oak Grove Community in DeKalb County, Georgia. It dates back to 1836, the same year that Emory College was organized. Although records of that period are scarce, we know that the first building was a twenty-by-forty-foot log cabin, erected on a portion of a land grant belonging to Milton C. Lively and located on Oak Grove Road. This old church survived Sherman's fires when he made his famous march to the sea, later became part of a family home, and remained standing until 1953.

The original deed contains the following colorful description of the property on which the second church building was erected: "Beginning at a hickory tree and running north one hundred and twenty yards to a pine knot, thence running west one hundred and ten yards to a dogwood tree or a bush, thence running south eighty-five yards to a rock, thence last running to the starting point--suppose to be two acres and a half." This deed was issued in 1888 for a new church (the second building) which was constructed on Oak Grove Road about where the Fellowship Hall is today. This building was also used as a two-room school for the area until the W. D. Thompson school was built in 1927, at which time the church building was torn down.

On November 25, 1896, the Trustees purchased a tract of land "containing one acre of land more or less" from Mrs. Matilda M. C. Durden which was located across Fair Oaks Road from the little log church. The 1896 deed describes the "bargain" between Mrs. Durden and the Trustees as, "premises shall be held, kept, maintained and disposed of as a burying ground and cemetery for the use of the membership. . . ." The first grave is dated 1896 and much of the history of Oak Grove Church can be told through the lives of members buried there.

Another one-room church, built around 1911, was located on Oak Grove Road across from the church-turned-school. The Rev. Charles Middlebrooks, Sr., was pastor. The cost of materials for this building was \$100 and the men of the church constructed the building. It was heated with a wood-burning stove and lighted with oil lamps as were most of the rural churches of that period. The women kept the church clean and the men built the fires. Oak Grove was part of a rural circuit for most of the years of its long history, serving well the farm community which existed in this area. In 1938, when the Rev. Bob Hayes was pastor and Oak Grove was on a charge with Tucker, Harmony Grove and Bethesda, the church decided it should be a station appointment. The Rev. Charles Gray was appointed as student pastor in 1939, the first pastor to serve the Oak Grove Church solely.

The membership in 1939 was 88. A frame parsonage was built that year on the site of the present kindergarten playground on Fair Oaks Road, and the Grays were the first parsonage family to occupy it. As the Sunday School grew this parsonage was converted to a children's building. It was eventually moved up the hill on Fair Oaks Road and served as the Associate Minister's parsonage until 1967. A new parsonage was built in 1956 on Kirkland Drive during the ministry of the Rev. Dan Maxey, Sr.

The fourth church building was constructed in four stages. A two-story educational building was started in 1948, used both for Sunday School and as a temporary place of worship. The sanctuary, which seated 425 persons, was added in 1954 during the pastorate of the Rev. James Welden. The contemporary educational wing containing children's classrooms, a kitchen and dining area was completed in 1959 during the pastorate of the Rev. Dan Maxey, Sr. The membership had grown to 760. The fourth stage was another two-story educational wing begun in 1959. This extension jutted out the north side of the 1948 structure and included one large adult classroom, nursery and elementary rooms.

Dr Webb Garrison was a student pastor in 1949 at the time the Annual Conference wondered why Oak Grove was anxious to support a full-time minister when they had the "cream of the crop" of ministerial students from Candler. Present-day Bishop James Armstrong was also a student pastor at Oak Grove in 1950 while a student at Candler.

The Reverend James L. Welden was appointed in 1952 as the first full-time pastor. The church had 214 members and during the four years of his pastorate increased to 518.

In 1959 the church purchased ten acres of adjacent land for future expansion. The Rev. Charles R. Williams was appointed pastor and during the four years of his ministry the membership increased to 1,465. The Rev. J. Clyde Callaway was appointed in 1964 as the fourth full-time pastor. The membership increased to 1,919 and the church developed plans to construct new facilities.

- The Rev. Larry B. Caywood was the first full-time associate pastor, coming to Oak Grove in 1964. He was followed by the Rev. Marcus A. Booker in 1966. A parsonage for the associate minister, located at 2586 Weigelia Road, was purchased in 1968.

Dr. H. Dan Rice was appointed to the church in 1967. Under his leadership a \$1,100,000 sanctuary and educational annex was built and dedicated in 1970. A three-manual, thirty-seven rank Schantz pipe organ was installed in 1970. The Rev. Warren Jones was associate minister 1967-69; the Rev. Jerry McCurdy, 1969-72. A new parsonage for the senior pastor, located on Kodiak Drive, was purchased in 1971. Total membership in 1972 was 2,385, church indebtedness was \$848,816, and the total budget was \$272,264.

Dr. Charles Boleyn was minister from 1972-80. Associates during this time were the Rev. Doug Volk, 1972-74; the Rev. Mark Rutland, 1974-76; the Rev. Jim Jenkins, 1976-78; and the Rev. Tom Atkins, 1979-80. The Rev. Joe Buffaloe began his ministry as Director of Music in 1979. Young men from Oak Grove who entered the ministry were Keith Kennedy, Duke; Ronnie Brannon, Emory; and Fred Peeples, Emory. Seminary students in school at Emory's Candler School of Theology served as youth workers. In 1973 five lay members went to Haiti under sponsorship of UMCOR to observe the mission work in that country. The Bethel Bible Series was begun in 1977, and the congregation sponsored a Vietnamese refugee family in 1980. Total membership in 1980 was 2,416, indebtedness was \$461,865, and the budget was \$425,000.

Dr. Robert E. Bridges was appointed to serve Oak Grove in 1980 and increased the staff to include the Rev. Stephen C. Rasor, Pastor of Administration and Planning; the Rev. Gary Rollins, Pastor of Counseling; Dr. Rembert Sisson, retired, Pastor of Visitation; the Rev. Jaynie Nell Hickman, Pastor of Single Adult Ministries; and the Rev. Joe Buffaloe, Pastor of Music and Worship. Young men from Oak Grove who entered the ministry included Wesley Griffin, Asbury; John Kearns, Asbury; Jim Moye, Jr., Emory; and Don Martin, Emory. A Chinese Church was organized in 1981 and the Rev. Ding Lau was appointed to serve this congregation located in Oak Grove facilities.

The history of any church is written day by day. We rejoice in God's leadership and blessings in the past and pray for continued guidance and vision that we "may serve the present age--our calling to fulfill."

"Beginning at a hickory tree and running north. . . ." Oak Grove United Methodist Church marches forward under the banner of Jesus Christ.

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